

News Release



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Contact: Steve Capps
(916) 651-8750

DONNER MEMORIAL STATE PARK CLOSING FOR THE SEASON

TRUCKEE – Because of continuing concern by Nevada County health officials over a possible outbreak of plague among animals in the Tahoe-Donner area of the Sierra, officials at California State Parks announced today that Donner Memorial State Park will remain closed for the season.

While no animals with the disease have been found in the park, Nevada County officials have reported two animals testing positive for the disease found adjacent to the park, and several dead rodents from within the park are still undergoing testing.

“We feel it is prudent to close the park at this time and avoid even the remote possibility of one of our visitors getting sick,” said Donner Memorial State Park Superintendent Marilyn Murphy. The park would have closed for the winter in a few weeks regardless of the current situation, she noted.

The park has been closed since last week after the Nevada County Health Department issued an alert for plague in the Donner area, and recommended to State Parks officials that Donner Memorial State Park be closed. In a letter to State Parks this week, the health department recommended that the park remain closed for the remainder of the summer season, although all three animals tested from within the park – two squirrels and a cat – tested negative for the disease.

The health officials said the rodent specimens were in poor condition – one had been run over and the other apparently drowned –so were not good subjects for testing. Additional dead animals from the park are currently being tested.

“The bottom line (is) the absence of detected plague in these specimens neither confirms nor excludes the possibility of plague in the Park,” the letter concluded. It recommended that the Donner Memorial State Park campgrounds and day use areas remain closed. The museum will continue operating during its normal operating hours, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily.

If plague is found among animals in the park, a treatment program will be undertaken. Because plague is transmitted by fleas, rodents and their burrows will be dusted treated with flea insecticide to halt spread of the disease.

Donner Memorial State Park is a popular summer destination for boaters, campers, hikers and day-use visitors. It was closed last week just before the busy Labor Day weekend, but campers with reservations were offered sites at nearby Lake Tahoe campgrounds.

Outbreaks of plague have occurred among animals in the Sierra in the past, including at Donner Memorial State Park and other recreational areas in the greater Truckee area. The disease has rarely been transmitted to humans, however.

The disease in humans is treatable with antibiotics. If left untreated, it can be fatal.

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